

The Girl Child in Orissa



awaiting a new dawn

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FOREWARD

I am glad that the UNICEF have brought out a folder entitled "The Girl Child in Orissa Awaiting a New Dawn." It is more than a mere folder; it is a chilling reminder of what we have not done all these years, of the many disadvantages that the girl child has accepted as her inheritance and, finally, of the long way we have to go to improve her status and her luck. Many a girl child leads what can best be described in Thoreau's words "lives of quiet desperation". This folder will sharpen our sensibilities which seem to have been dulled to apathy.

Denial of opportunities which the Directive Principles of State Policy of our Constitution, and Article-2 of the UN Convention on The Rights of The Child, to which India is a signatory State, have guaranteed, will amount to violation of the girl child's rights.

By enforcing these rights only will we ensure that the new dawn brightens up the life of the girl child in Orissa.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "K. B. Verma". Below the signature, the date "30/7/79" is written diagonally.

K. B. VERMA

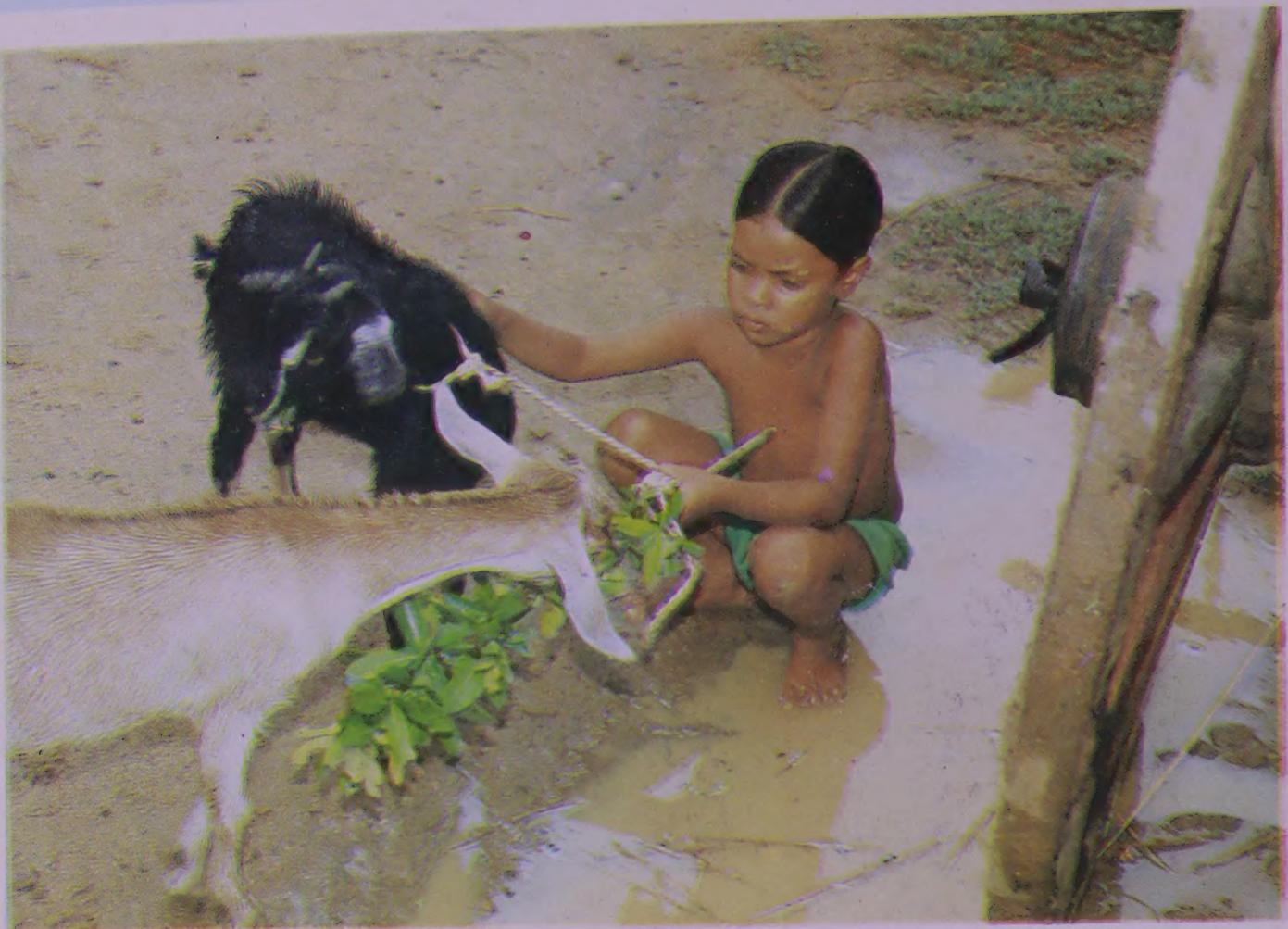
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THE GIRL CHILD IN ORISSA AWAITING A NEW DAWN

During 1990, the SAARC Year of the Girl Child, vigorous advocacy efforts were undertaken all over India to bring into focus the situation of young girls. The impetus for these efforts was provided by the reasoning that the situation of girls anticipates the socially and culturally disadvantaged condition of women

limiting their development and constraining their childhood. A number of discussion forums, research studies and investigations conducted during that year amply substantiated the fact that girls are "uneven recipients" of progress and that being young and female constitutes a double disadvantage which is accentuated by poverty.





In response, government and non-government organizations in several states undertook to initiate activities to restore to the girl her rights as a child. These activities included the development of information materials, the execution of research studies, the gender disaggregated analyses of existing health, nutrition, educational, economic participation and vital statistics data, as well as special initiatives such as a cultural camp for girls in Orissa, a communication campaign against child marriage in Rajasthan or the involvement of adolescent girls in the ICDS scheme in Andhra Pradesh. In fact the period 1990-2000 has been declared as the SAARC Decade of the Girl child, to maintain the momentum and continue the search for solutions.

An assessment of the situation of women and the value systems that circumscribe their role and status, as well as the widespread poverty in the state give one reason to believe that the situation of girls in Orissa is no better than that of their sisters in other parts of the country. It may in fact be worse.

Some critical clues are available in the State Census data. It is by piecing these together that we propose to develop a case for the girl child and chart the direction that corrective social, educational and developmental action should take.

VITAL STATISTICS

According to natural trends, more males than females are born. Being constitutionally weaker more males die within the first year after birth. The excess of male births is nature's device of ensuring that, all things being equal, approximately equivalent numbers of males and females survive beyond the vulnerable years of childhood.

In Orissa, the sex ratio, which is accepted as a highly sensitive indicator of the status of women and girls, stands at 972 females per 1000 males (Census of India, 1991)

Close to 1100 males are born for every 1000 female births in Orissa. The imbalance soon gets adjusted because of the excess of male infant deaths - about 1220 for every 1000 female infant deaths. The average sex ratio of 972 (national average 929) suggests that **females lose their biological advantage** somewhere along the line. An examination of vital statistics data shows that there are two

stages during which there is an excess of female deaths - **early childhood 1-4 years**, and the **childbearing years 15-24 years**.

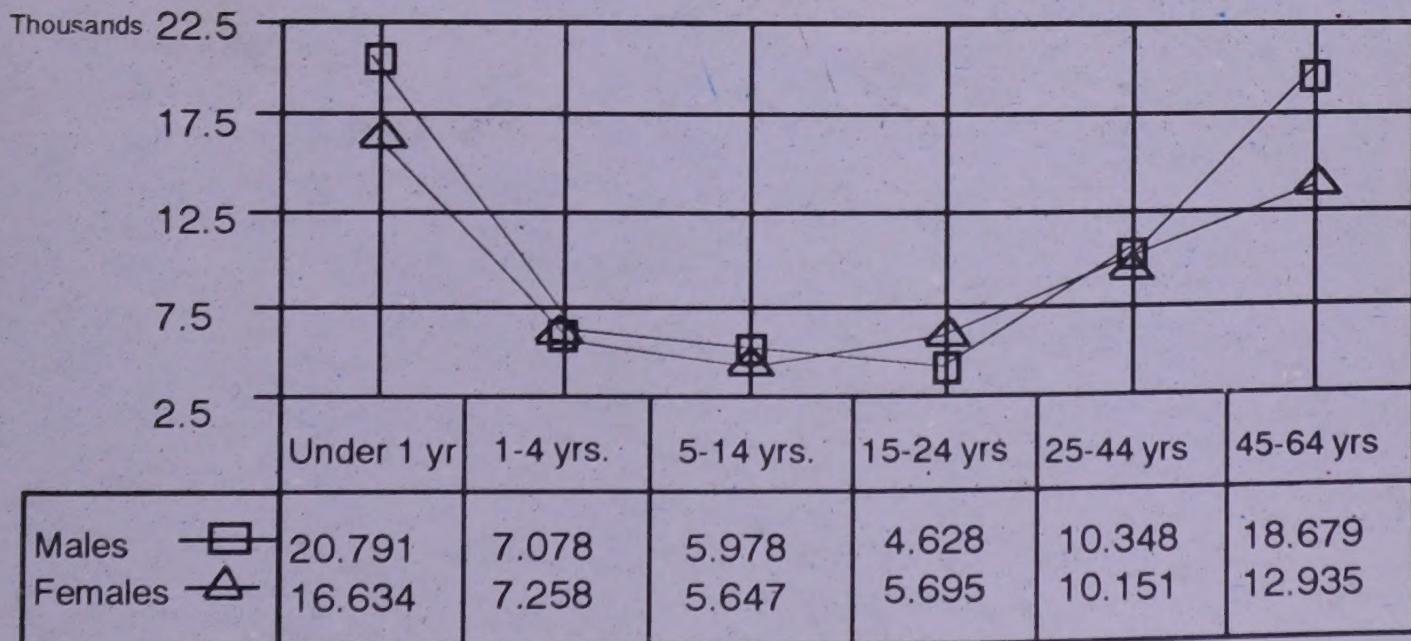
Demographic data reveal a second worrying trend.

In Orissa, there has been a steep and progressive decline in the sex ratio since 1921 when it was 1086.

This decline is consistent for all the districts of the state. The sex ratio at both the national level and the state level has been deteriorating over the past seven decades. However, compared to the national level where the sex ratio has fallen from 955 in 1921 to 929 in 1991 (a change of 26 points), the decline in Orissa has been much more rapid - from 1086 in 1921 to 972 in 1991 (a change of 157 points).

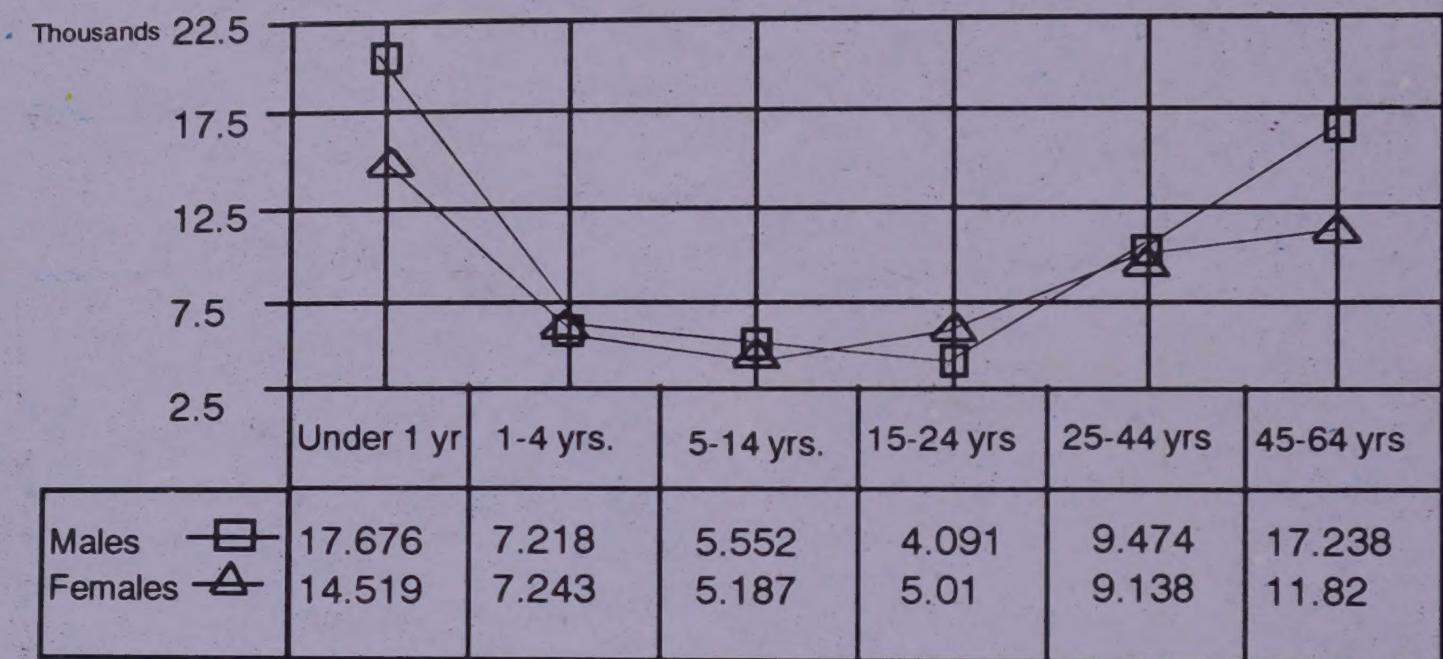
A third trend in Orissa, which is converse to global figures is that of male and female life expectancies. Normally females have a higher life expectancy at birth.

REGISTERED DEATHS BY AGE AND SEX, ORISSA 1988



REGISTERED DEATHS BY AGE AND SEX, ORISSA

(average annual deaths 1984 - 1988)



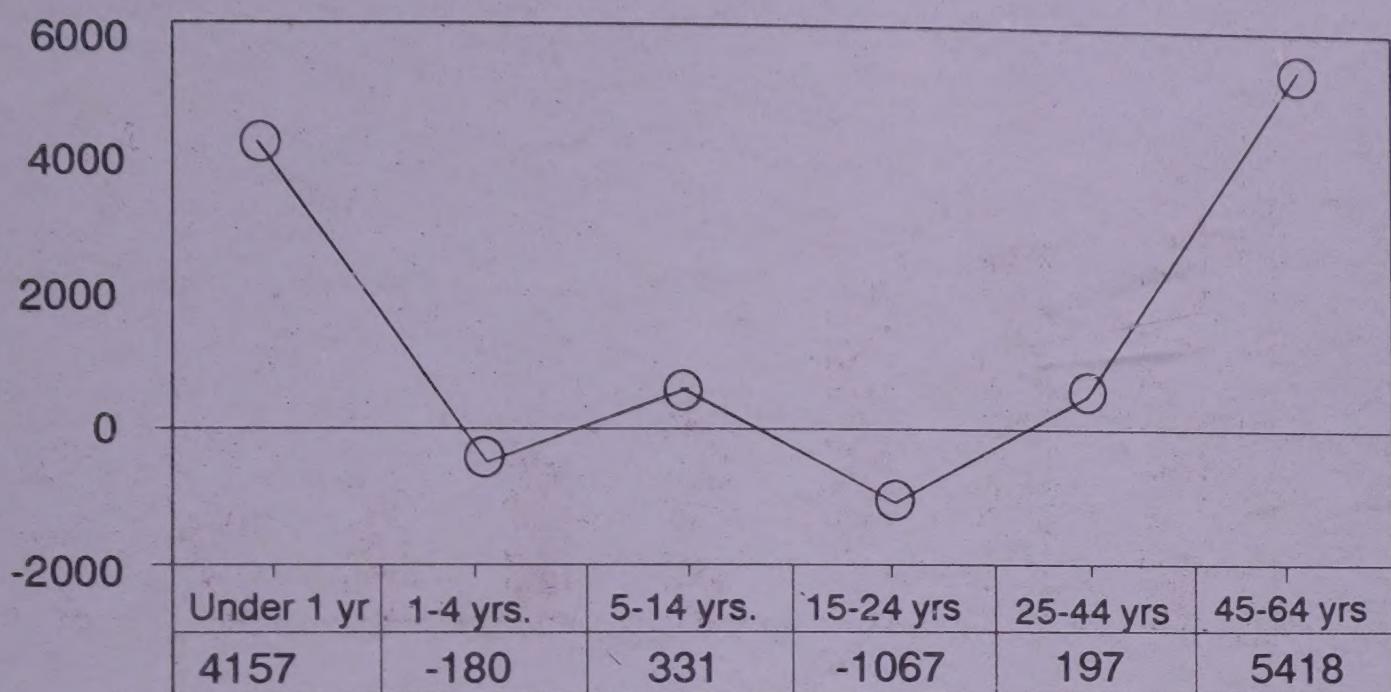
Source : Ibid.

According to 1985-90 data, the life expectancy at birth for females was 56.6 years 1.1 years less than that for males.

Taken together, the low and continuously deteriorating sex ratio as well as abnormal life expectancy figures suggest that larger numbers of girls and women in Orissa die possibly because they have unequal access to health

services and that their condition is worsening compared to that of their male counterparts. There is a significant need for gender disaggregated births, deaths, and causes of death data in order to understand the problem better. There is also a need for data which reveal how often girl children, as compared to boys, are brought to health centres for medical attention.

MALE MINUS FEMALE REGISTERED DEATHS, ORISSA, 1988



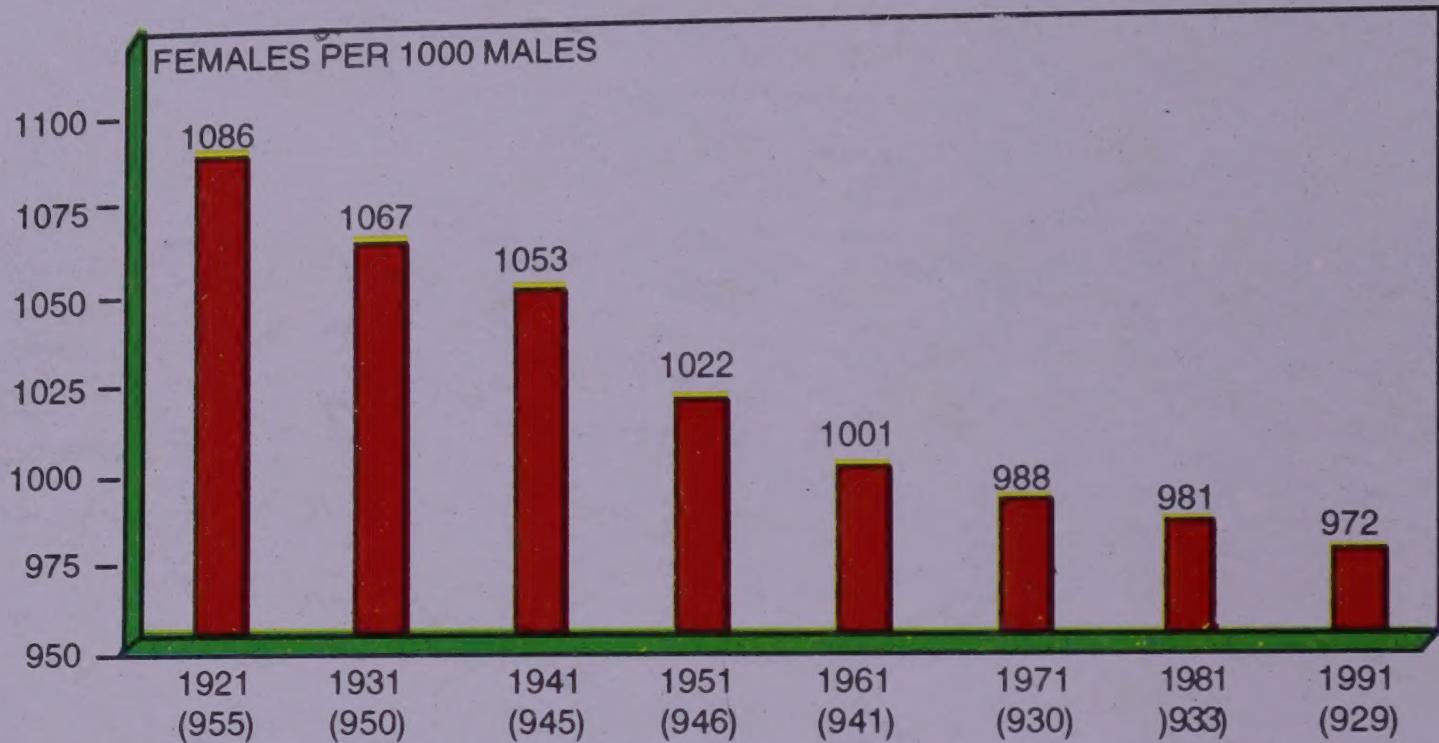
Source : Statistical Abstract 1991. Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Orissa

Percentage Distribution of Deaths by Age Groups -- 1988, Orissa and All India

State/ Country	Below 1 yr.	Age groups in years							Total
		1-4	5-14	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55 +	
Orissa	21.7	6.2	5.8	3.9	4.6	4.3	5.0	48.5	100.0
India	15.0	7.5	4.6	4.8	5.1	5.5	7.0	50.5	100.0

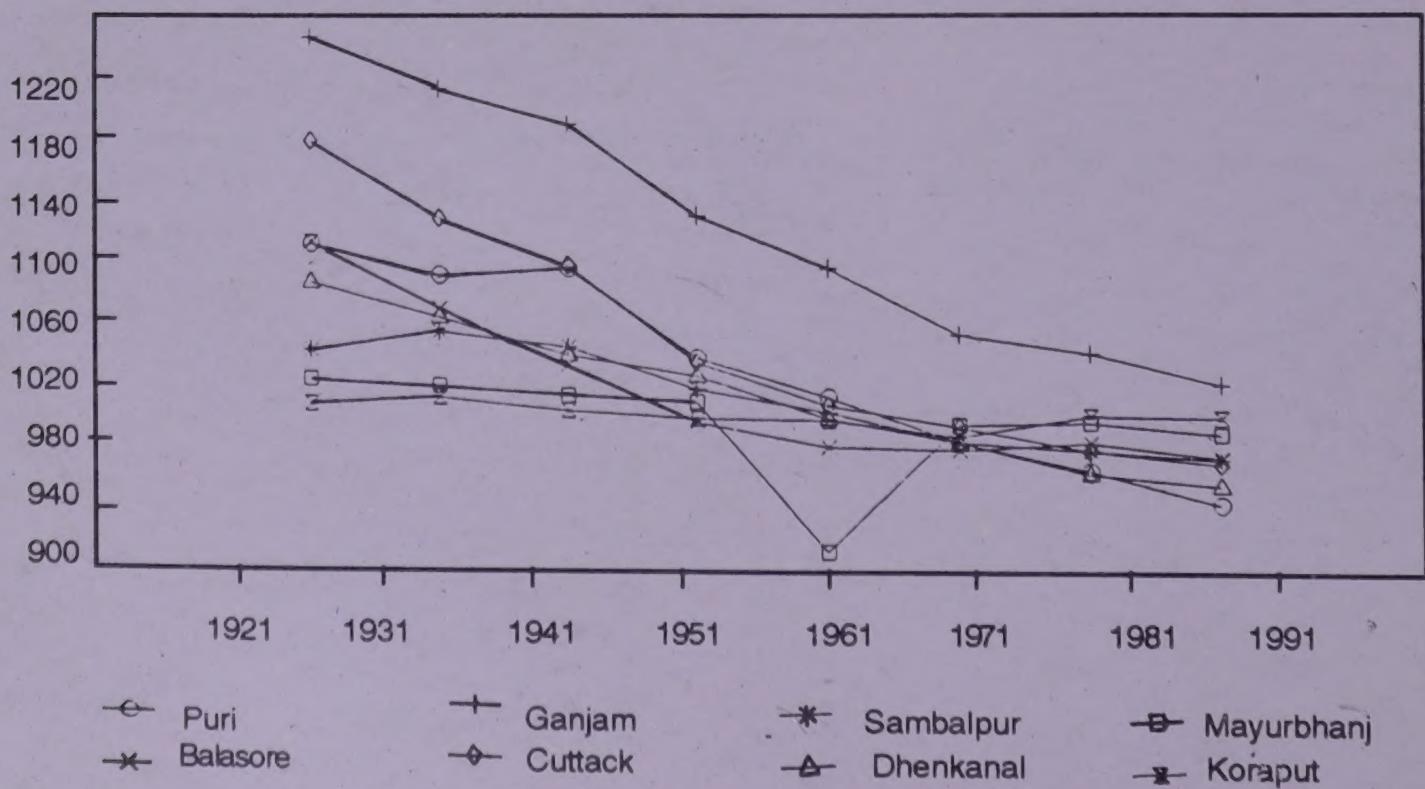
Source : Survey of Causes of Death (Rural) Series 3, No.21, Annual Report 1988, Published in March 1990, Office of the Registrar General, India.

DECLINING SEX RATIO IN ORISSA 1921 - 1991



Source : Census of India 1991 - Orissa Provisional Population Totals
 [Figures in brackets are for All India]

DECLINING SEX RATIO IN THE 8 MOST POPULOUS DISTRICTS OF ORISSA 1921 - 1991



Source : Census of India 1991 - Orissa Provisional Population Totals.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

As a direct consequence of poverty, malnutrition and ill-health among children are widespread in Orissa. However, gender disaggregated health and nutrition data are

There is a significant need to gather quantitative and qualitative gender disaggregated health and nutrition data. We need information on gender-differentiated dietary consumption patterns and access to



unavailable making it impossible to assess the nature and extent of differences in the health and nutrition status of boys and girls. Scattered micro-level studies suggest that a higher number of males as compared to females utilize the out-patient facilities of health centres.

Maternal mortality, while reflecting the low availability and/or utilization of appropriate health services is positively related to anaemia and non-achievement of maternal height and weight potential. In fact, maternal death is the tragic end of the road for girls whose health and nutrition deficiencies have accumulated to fatal proportions.

food within the household. We need to know the nature, causes and extent of diseases and nutritional deficiencies suffered by males and females. All health and nutrition related reporting, surveillance and monitoring methods should treat girls and boys as two separate groups in order to yield information of gender imbalances. Variations among children in different socioeconomic and cultural groups should also be recorded. This information will help us to understand the gender disparate demographic trends in Orissa and also to identify suitable, and gender appropriate, courses of action.

EDUCATION

In Orissa, there are wide gender differentials at all levels of education. Because of a mix of economic and cultural factors fewer girls than boys have access to education. Among those girls who do attend school there are high rates of wastage and stagnation. Here are some facts:

According to the 1991 Census, the literacy rate for females is 34.4 per cent as compared to 62.37 per cent for males; the female literacy rate is even lower in the rural

population (18.5 per cent)* and worse still among the Scheduled Castes (9.4 per cent) * and Scheduled Tribes (5 per cent)*.[* 1981 Census figures.]

There has been a steady increase in the number of primary, middle and secondary schools in Orissa. There has been an increase in female teachers at all levels of schooling.

The Fifth Educational Survey 1987/88 showed that only 47 per cent of girls in urban and 41.6 per cent girls in rural areas were



enrolled in primary schools; among SC and ST groups the percentage of girls enrolled in primary classes was 39.9 and 36.5 respectively. (It is worth noting that school enrolment figures do not reflect accurately school attendance, which, for a variety of reasons, is comparatively less.)

In rural areas, of every 100 girls who enrol in Class I only 40 remain in Class V; the retention rate in urban areas is much higher at 74 per cent. The combined retention rate (rural and urban) for girls is 43.1 per cent.

Among the 29 per cent children aged 11 or over who are enrolled in Class VI and above, only 37 per cent are girls.

Of every 100 girls who enrol in Class I merely 16 go on to complete Class X.

Two principal reasons that deny girls' access to education in Orissa as elsewhere are poverty (which forces children to work) and traditional belief that education is of little use to girls whose only destiny is marriage and motherhood. Girls are required to assume domestic and child care responsibilities from a very young age in order to release their mothers for remunerative work.

In the context of the Universalization of Primary Education several urgent steps will have to be undertaken in order to improve the educational status of girls in Orissa. Special efforts will have to be made to **enrol and retain girls** in school. Steps will also have to be taken to **educate the community** about the need and importance of educating children, especially girls.

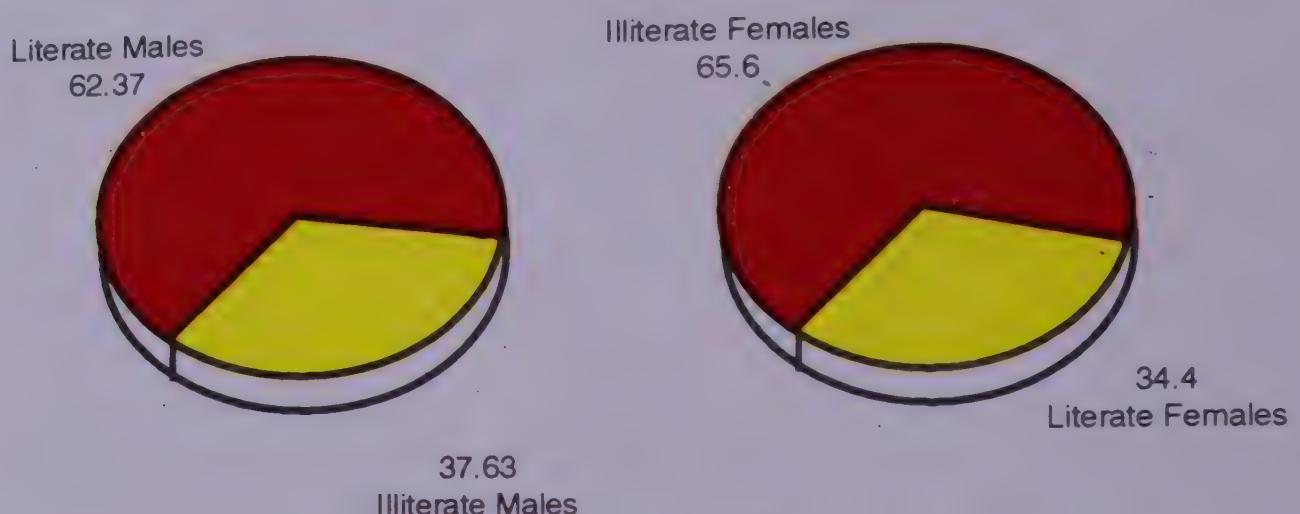
With respect to the school, it is commonly accepted that a few measures are necessary to attract and retain girls in school. These include:

- o **flexibility** in school timings, attendance requirements and performance and achievement criteria so as to accommodate to girls' need to participate in domestic and seasonal agricultural activities;
- o **provision for lateral entry** in order to enable those girls who have been forced to drop out of education to resume their studies even after extended periods of absence;
- o **greater recruitment of women teachers** (this trend is already apparent in Orissa) and **sensitization of teachers** to the issue of girls' education;

LITERACY RATES - ORISSA, 1961 - 1991

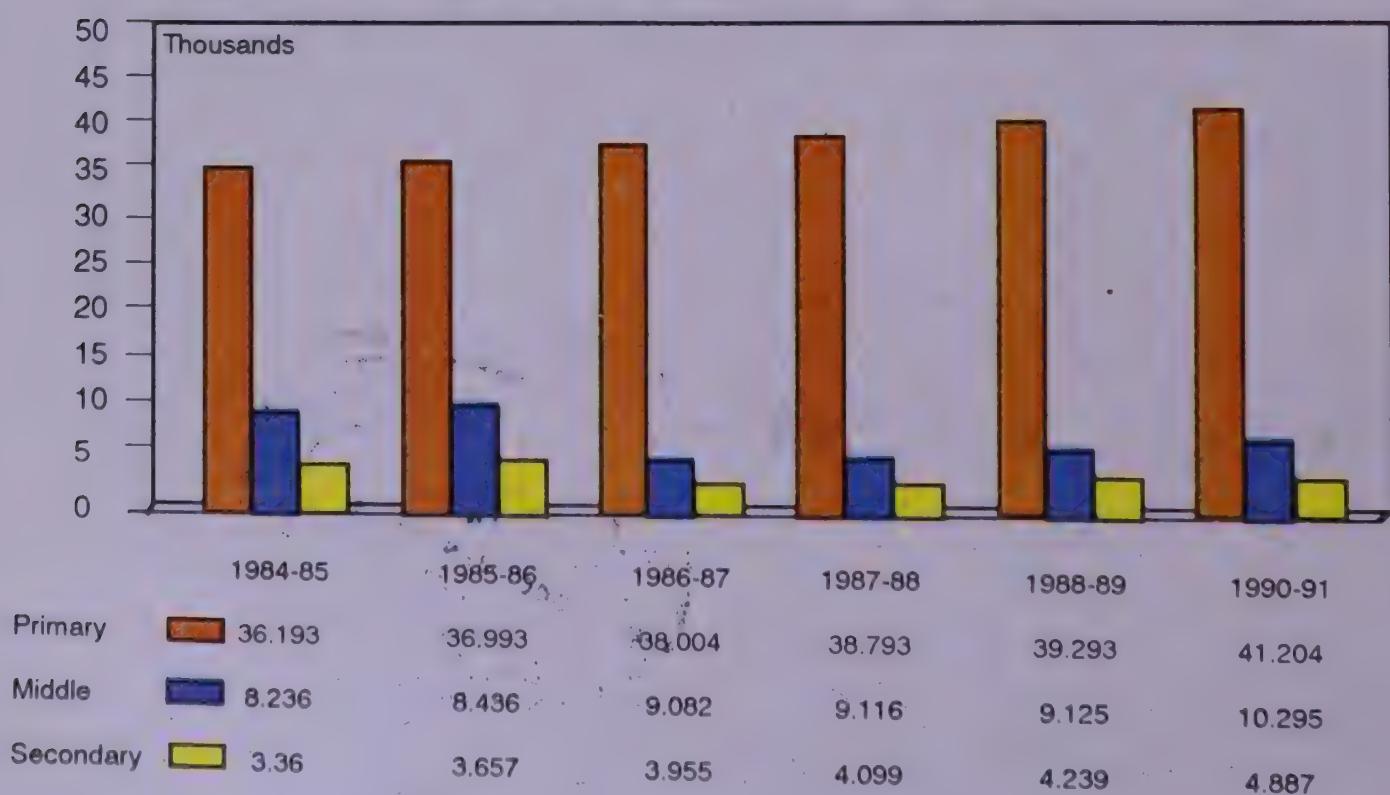


PER CENT LITERATE AND ILLITERATE MALES AND FEMALES IN ORISSA - 1991



Source : Census of India 1991 - Orissa Provisional Population Totals

NUMBER OF SCHOOLS IN ORISSA 1984-85 - 1990-91



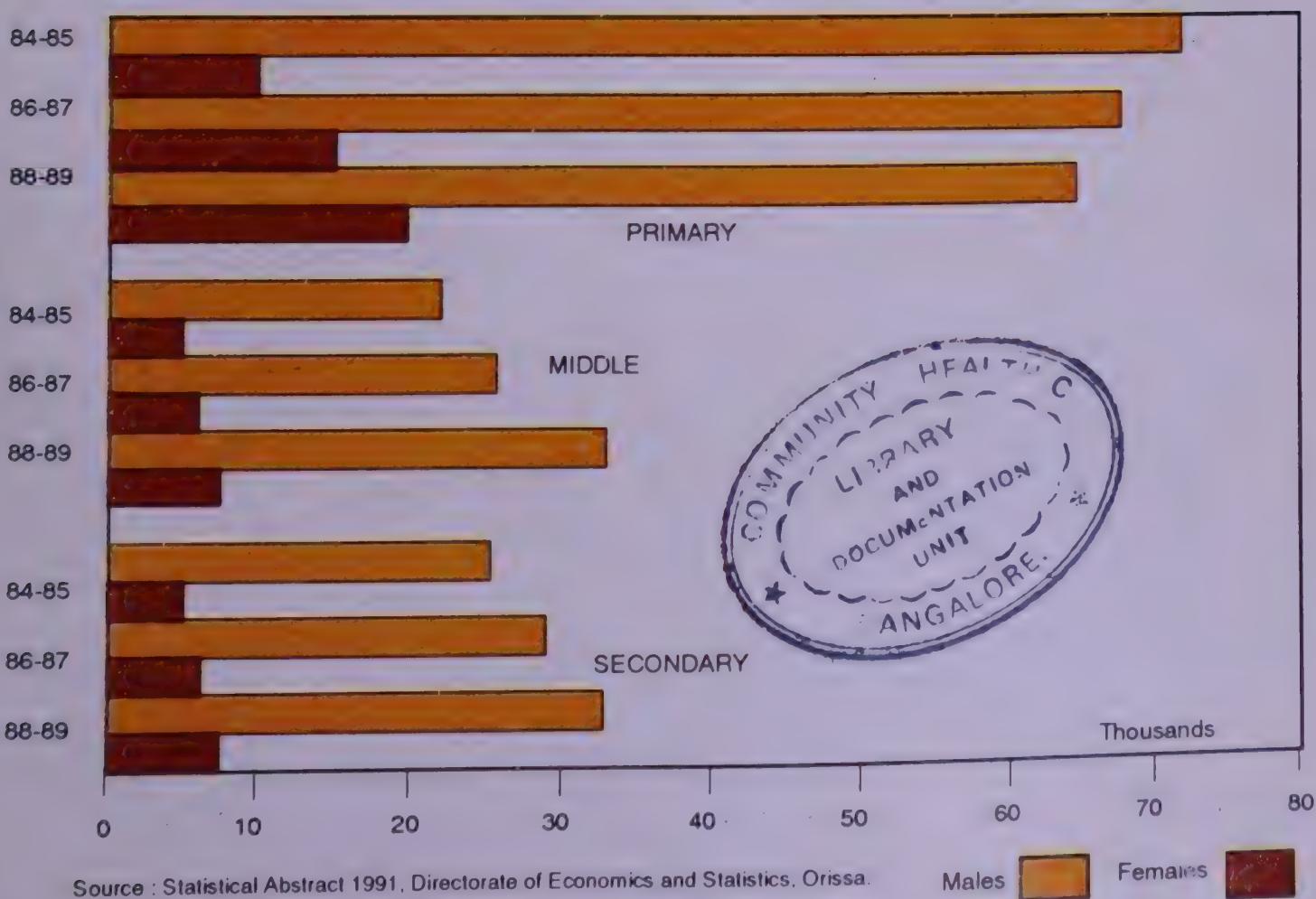
Source : Statistical Abstract 1991, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Orissa.

Districtwise Percentage of Rural Population Served by Primary Schools / Sections within Different Distance Ranges

Sl.No.	Name of the district	Percentage of Population served				
		Within the habitation	Within 1.0 Km.	Within 1.5 Km.	Within 2.0 Km.	Beyond 2.0 Km.
1	2	3	4	5	6	
1.	Balasore	67.46	25.39	3.44	2.66	1.05
2.	Bolangir	66.26	24.26	1.41	4.34	3.73
3.	Cuttack	79.28	17.8	1.24	1.10	0.58
4.	Dhenkanal	80.14	15.32	0.72	2.52	1.30
5.	Ganjam	90.35	5.3	0.63	1.23	2.49
6.	Kalahandi	81.48	7.88	1.48	3.08	6.06
7.	Keonjhar	80.20	12.00	1.64	3.33	2.83
8.	Koraput	72.66	9.89	2.12	5.03	10.30
9.	Mayurbhanj	70.02	21.42	1.97	4.35	2.24
10.	Phulbani	69.00	20.7	1.60	4.50	4.20
11.	Puri	64.90	27.6	4.14	2.08	1.28
12.	Sambalpur	84.40	8.90	1.20	2.90	2.60
13.	Sundargarh	61.10	28.16	3.98	4.20	2.56
Total State		77.08	15.75	1.87	2.60	2.70

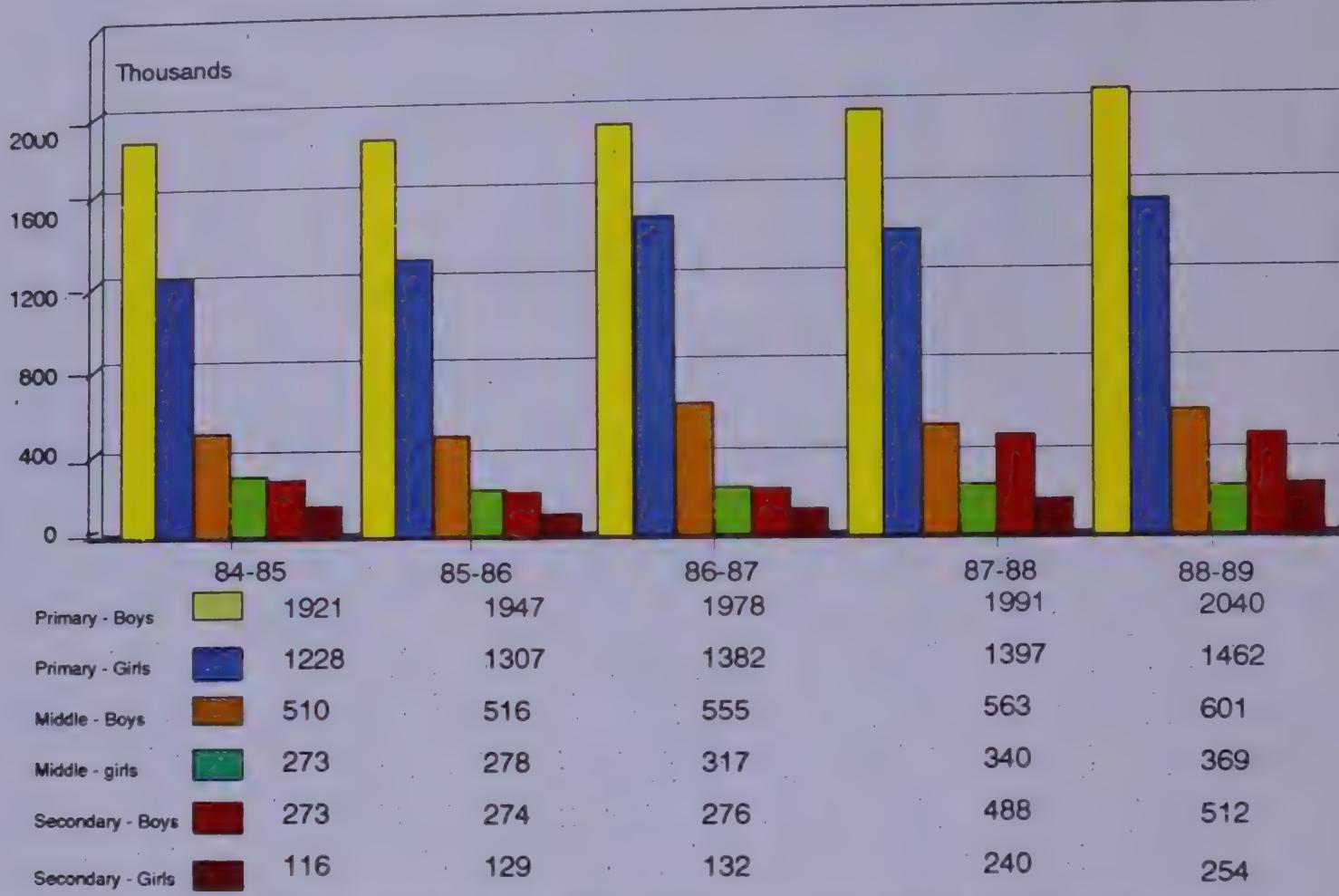
Source: Fifth All India Educational Survey, Directorate of Elementary Education, Orissa.

**NUMBER OF TEACHERS IN SCHOOLS AT THREE LEVELS
1984-85, 1986-87, 1988-89**



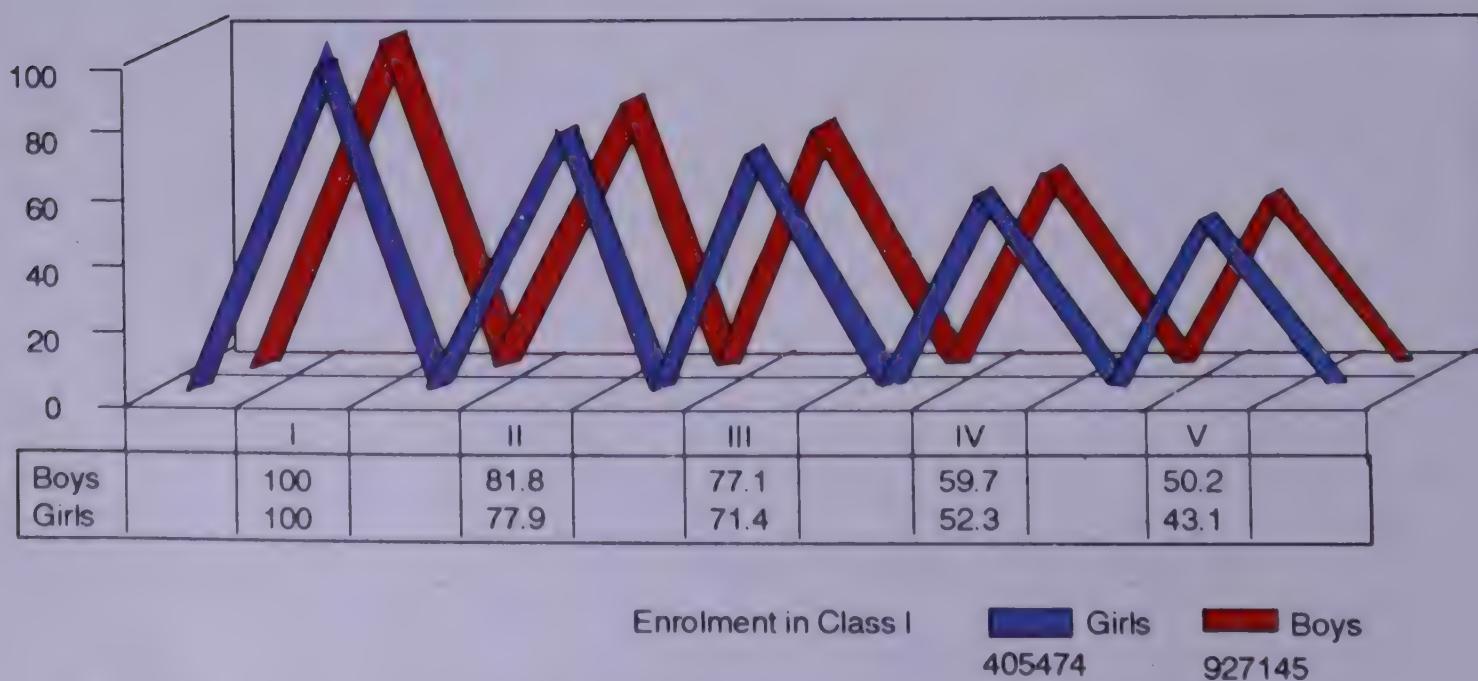
Source : Statistical Abstract 1991, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Orissa.

ENROLMENT OF PUPILS AT 3 LEVELS OF SCHOOLING



Source : Statistical Abstract 1991, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Orissa.

RETENTION IN PRIMARY SCHOOL - CLASSES I - V



Source : Fifth Educational Survey of India, 1987-88.

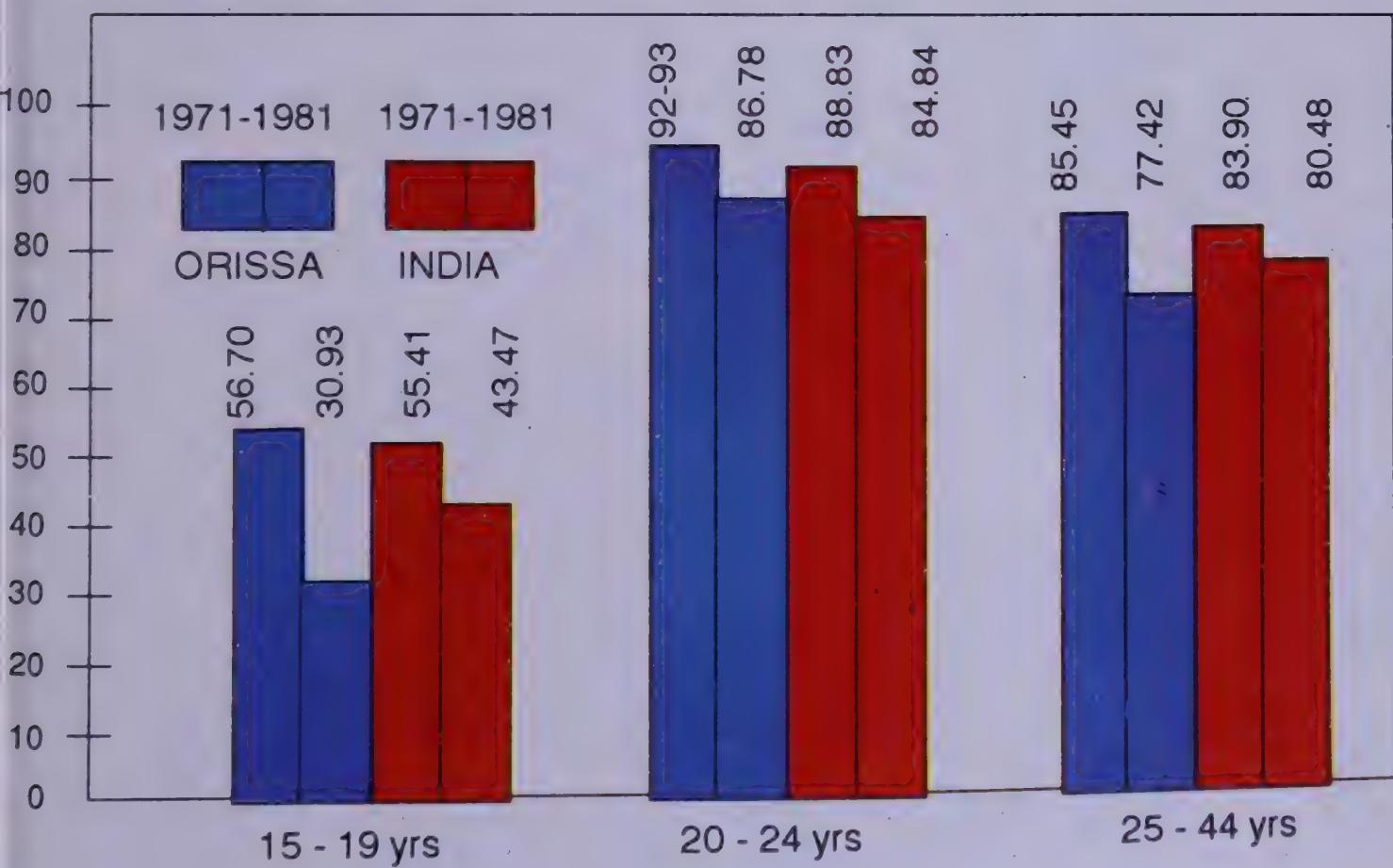
MARRIAGE

Marriage is almost universal for men and women in Orissa. The singulate mean age at marriage increased during the 1971-1981 decade from 22.57 to 24.17 for males and from 17.29 to 19.04 for females. While these figures are higher than the national average figures (23.3 years - males and 18.32 years - females), it still means that for every girl in Orissa who marries at or above 19 years, there is one who marries below this age. In fact, there are wide variations from one area to another. In 1971,

nearly 4 per cent of girls under 15 years in the state were enumerated as married and in 1981, reportedly 15,509, 10-14 year old girls were married in Orissa.

It is very rare for a girl child who has been widowed or deserted to remarry at a later stage. A widowed girl is considered to be inauspicious. If a girl is widowed after she has borne children the likelihood of her marrying again is next to impossible.

Marriage Proportion 1971 and 1981





Apart from the social repercussions, early marriage is associated with early child bearing and higher fertility. Girls who start having children early, generally have more children, at

shorter intervals - thereby entering three of the obstetrically "at risk" categories of "too early", "too close" and "too many"

Selected Nuptiality Indicators, Orissa And India

Indicator	Orissa		India	
	1971	1981	1971	1981
Proportion married in age groups				
15 - 19 Yrs	56.70	30.93	55.41	43.47
20 - 24	92.93	86.78	88.83	84.84
25 - 44	85.44	77.42	83.90	80.48
Singulate mean age at Marriage				
Male	22.57	24.17	22.36	23.27
Female	17.29	19.04	14.16	18.32
Married couples per 1000 Population	175	164	170	169

Source : Year Book 1986, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

In a baseline study conducted in five project districts of the Area Development Programme (ADP) in Orissa, it was found that the proportion of women currently pregnant was highest in the age groups 15 - 19 years and 20 - 24 years.

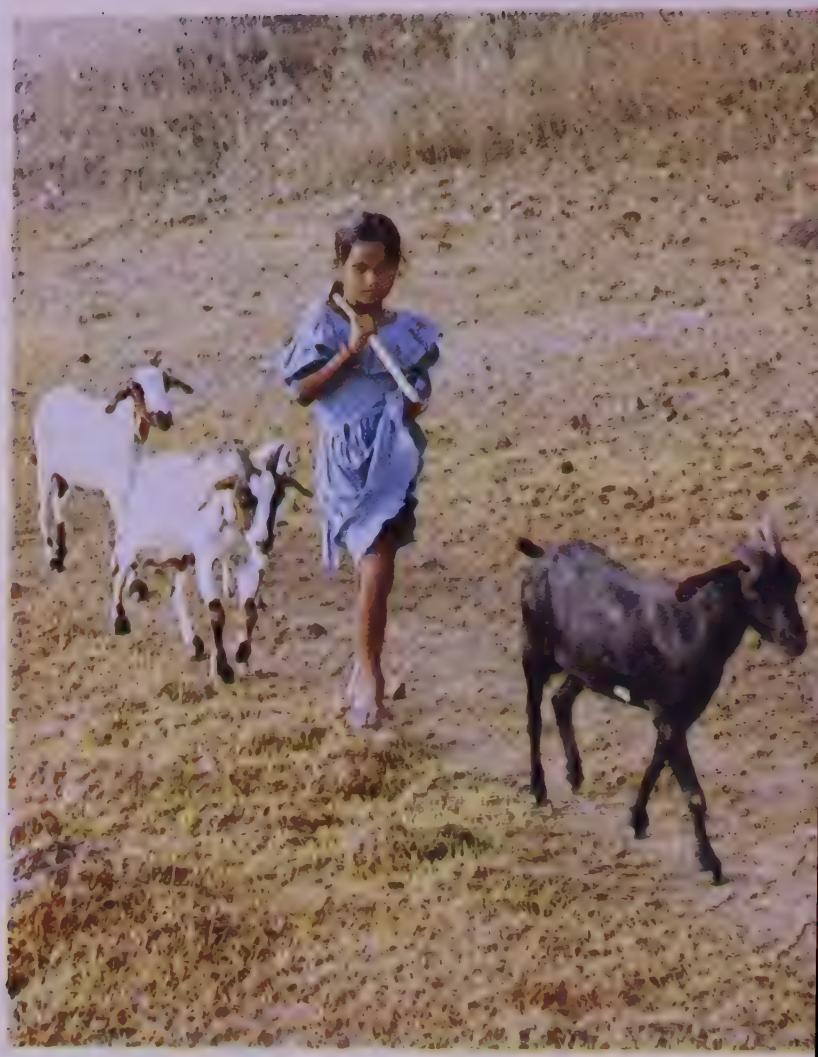
Malnourishment combined with early pregnancy results in physical wastage, birth complications and the delivery of underweight babies who have reduced chances of survival. Pregnancy before complete physical maturity is also associated with higher maternal mortality rates. The excess of female deaths in the age group 15 - 24 years suggests that a large number of young women lose their lives due to causes related to child bearing and delivery. It

has been estimated that 10, 257 mothers die annually in Orissa due to pregnancy related causes.

Clearly, both early marriage and early child bearing need to be discouraged. Widespread awareness needs to be generated about the law forbidding early marriage, the harmful physical, psychological and social effects of early marriage on individual girls, as well as the relationship between early pregnancy and infant, child and maternal mortality and morbidity. In effect, creating public opinion against early marriage is the only effective means of discouraging the practice.

CHILD LABOUR

In 1981 there were 5.15 lakh children (age group 5 - 14 years) in Orissa who were main workers and 1.87 lakh who were marginal workers. The child labour participation rate was higher in rural (10.3 per cent) as compared to urban (3.7 per cent). Girls formed 37.8 per cent of all (main and marginal) child labourers. In rural areas

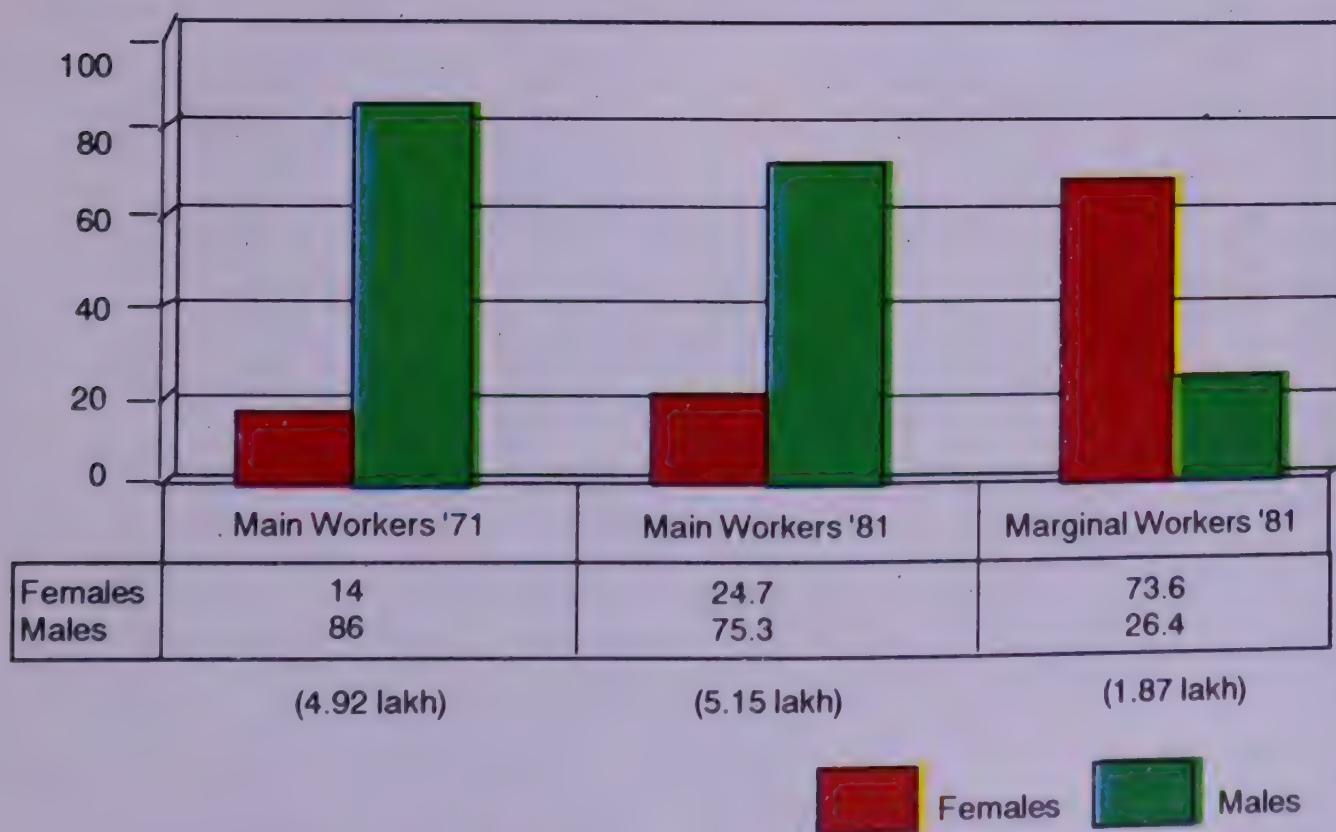


girl children work mainly as farm workers. Girls are involved in grazing animals and farm operations such as sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, sorting and grading. In urban areas they are mainly employed in occupations such as beedi making, agarbati making and in the match industry.

Girls also spend a great deal of time in the home cooking, cleaning, and looking after younger siblings as well as in fetching water and gathering fuel and fodder - "invisible" pursuits that are not necessarily recognized as work. As in the case of women, domestic chores are considered to be the "natural" familial duty of girls. Household tasks defy quantification and monetary valuation. (In 1985 it was estimated that by the time she ceases to be a child, the girl in rural India has contributed assistance to the family which in economic terms is to the tune of Rs.39,600.) Despite all their work girls are not valued as much as their brothers who are viewed as potential wage earners.

Work in childhood closes down a child's "developmental options". Early work responsibilities interfere with girls' opportunities to receive an education and perpetuate the low skill-low income poverty-exploitation cycle. Although the appropriate anti-child labour laws exist in the country, they do not cover all forms of work and are difficult to enforce given widespread poverty and inadequate supportive public opinion. It may be unrealistic to talk about eradicating child labour. But it is possible to talk about regulating and controlling it. For a start we need qualitative and quantitative information to assess the work burden of boys and girls. We also need to know how various forms of work affect the lives of children in the state.

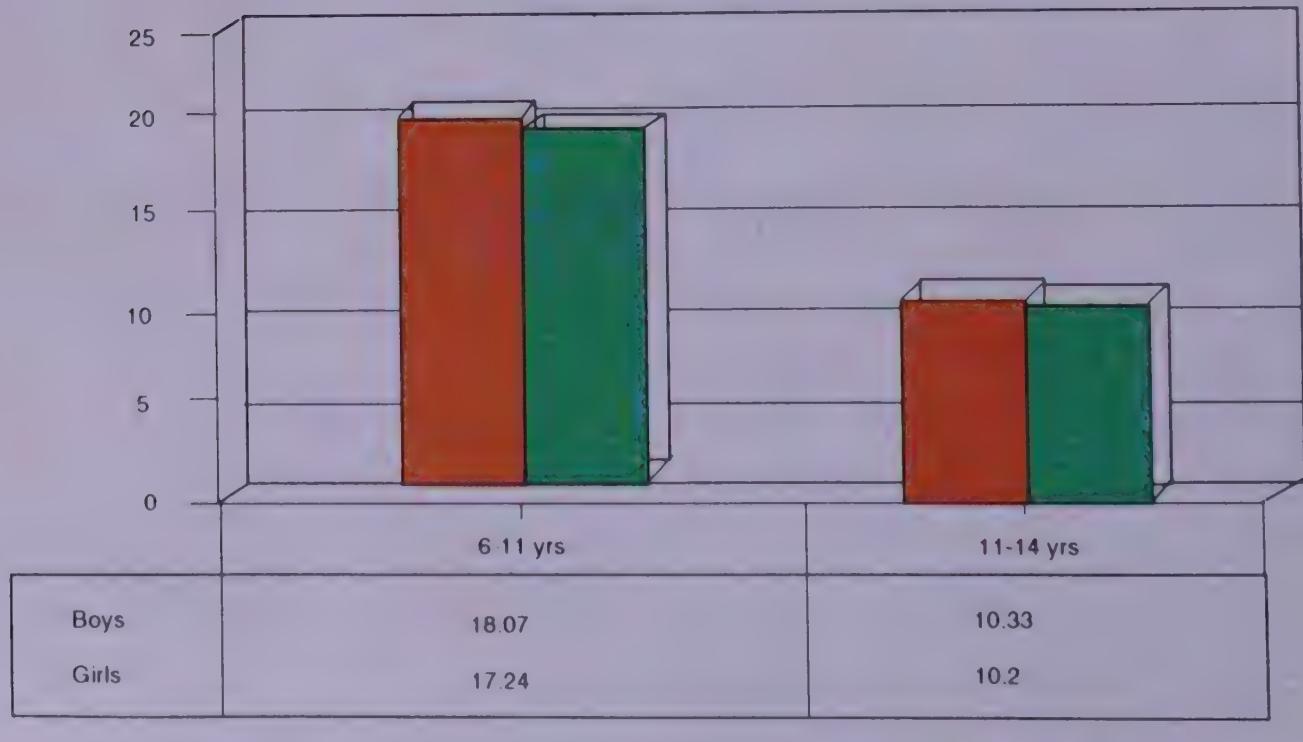
ORISSA - PER CENT COMPOSITION OF CHILD LABOUR BY SEX



Source : Census of India, 1971 & 1981



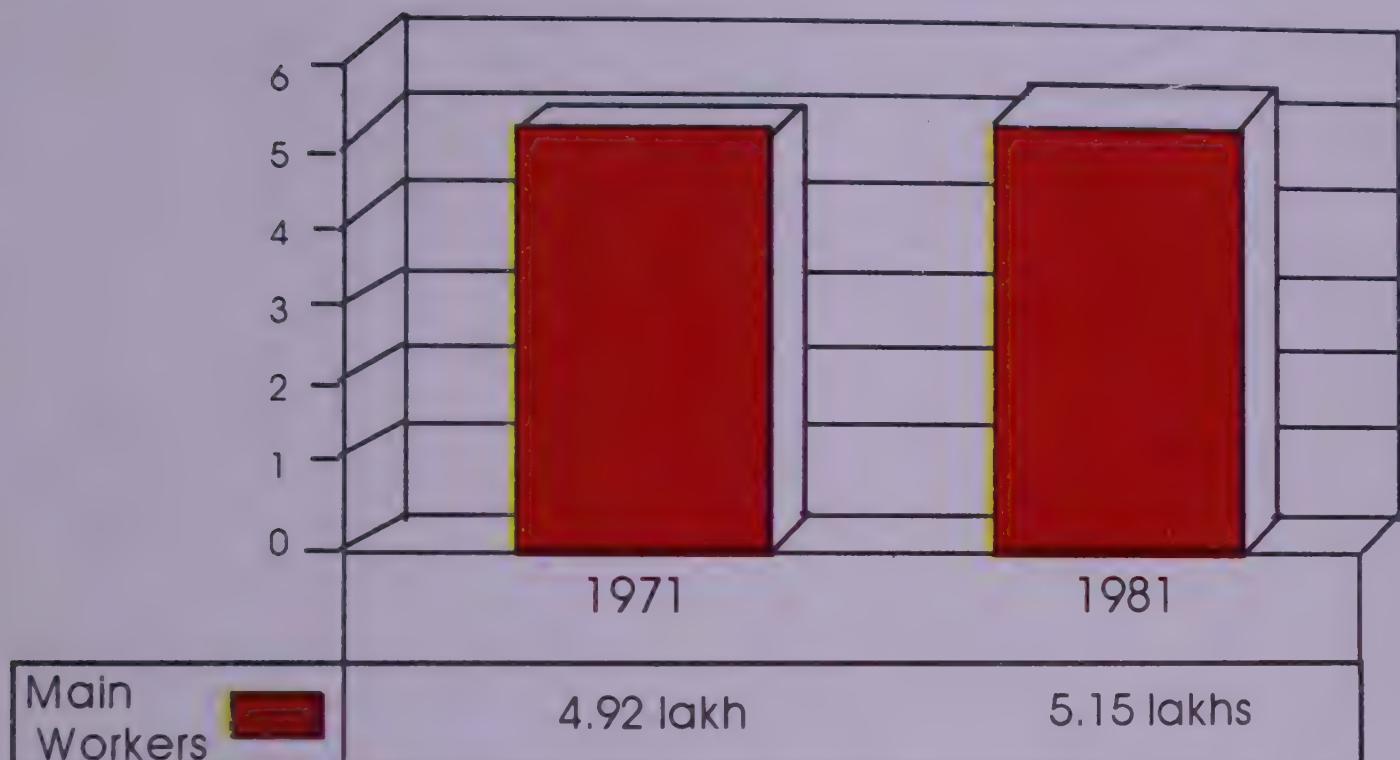
ESTIMATED CHILD POPULATION 6-14 YEARS (in lakhs)



	6-11 yrs	11-14 yrs
Boys	18.07	10.33
Girls	17.24	10.2

Boys Girls

INCREASE IN NUMBER OF CHILD WORKERS 1971 - 1981



Source : Census of India, 1971 & 1981.

TO BE BORN A GIRL.....

"Traditionally, Oriya society is very patriarchal. From the day she is born, a girl is considered to be a burden. She is treated as a guest in the household and as someone who will take a dowry at marriage and leave her parents considerably poorer, although similar ceremonies are conducted for boys and girls, those for boys are definitely more lavish. In rural areas people do not feel it is necessary to



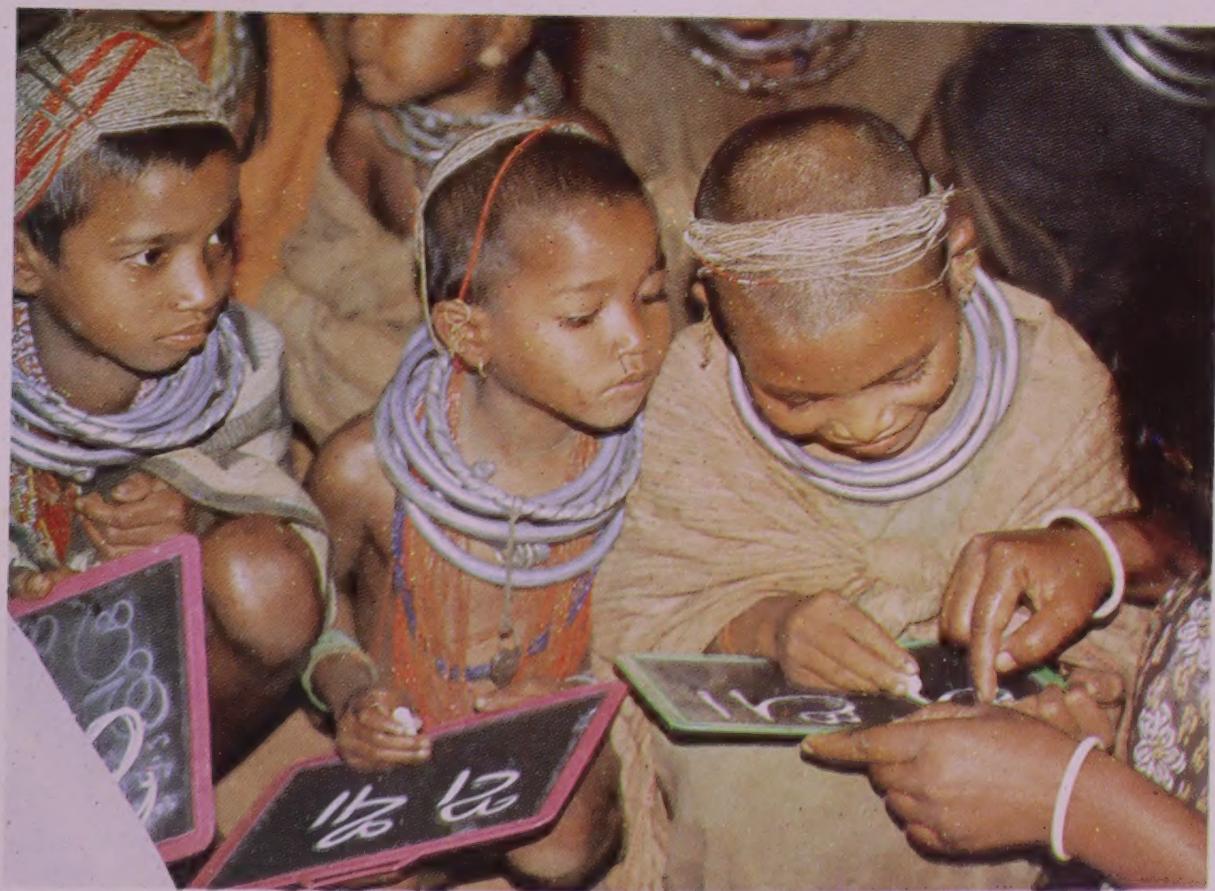
send a girl to school. They ask, "What will she do with an education ? She will only create trouble for herself and others." Of course a woman's principal duty is to produce a son, if she gives birth to two or three daughters, a husband feels justified to marry again and society supports him in this...."

Extract from an interview with Lekha Safui, Home Scientist, Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Kausalyaganga.

THE RIGHT TO CHILDHOOD

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children regardless of age, sex and ethnic affiliation have the right to be free from hunger, disease, ignorance and poverty. In Orissa the girl child is not only a victim of want but also of the social and cultural values that disfavour women. As a result girls are valued less, they work harder and longer hours, they are denied their right to participate in education and this limits their personal, social and intellectual horizons. Both government and non-government organizations will have undertaken wide-ranging action in order to redress this situation.

A critical requirement is to gather gender disaggregated data in the various development sectors in order to assess accurately the situation of girls. There is an overall need to incorporate a gender perspective into all our explorations, analyses, programmes and policies. The media must be activated for advocacy at all levels. Public awareness needs to be created regarding the social injustice suffered by girls and the importance of restoring to them their rights as children. Special emphasis must be laid on the question of girls' education - not only because female literacy is strongly associated with lower fertility rates, lower infant and child mortality rates, higher age at marriage and so on - but because every child has a right to education.



STATISTICS AT A GLANCE - 1991

INDIA

843 930 861
437 597 929
406 332 932
929

160 601 764

23.5

267

30.5

10.2

91

59.3

23.27

18.32

52.11

63.86

39.42

Total Population
Male
Female
Sex Ratio
(females per 1000 males)

Absolute Increase
in Population (1981 - 91)

Decadal Growth Rate
per cent (1981-1991)

Density
(persons per sq. km.)

Estimated

Crude Birth Rate *

Estimated

Crude Death Rate *

Estimated

Infant Mortality Rate *

Life Expectancy at Birth

Females

Mean Age at Marriage

Males

Females

Total Literacy Rate (%) 7+

Males

Females

ORISSA

31 512 070
15 979 904
15 532 166
972

5 141 799

19.50

202

30.2

12.6

122

56.6

24.17

19.04

48.55

62.37

34.40

* Provisional 1989 figures.

